

USAWC STRATEGIC RESEARCH PROJECT

MILITARY-TO- MILITARY COOPERATION WITH VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

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Southeast Asia is a key crossroads of the Pacific Region, and conducting military-to-military cooperation with Vietnam directly supports our vital interests in this region.

Southeast Asia is a mixture of religious and cultural dynamics. It has many natural resources, to include large oil reserves in Vietnam's territorial waters, and potentially larger oil reserves around the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. These islands have been laid claim to by six Asian nations, of which China and Vietnam are among them. Additionally, China's growing economic prowess and attempts to increase influence in Southeast Asia make her a competitor to U.S. regional interests.

The United States reestablished direct diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1995. Since that time we have signed counter-narcotics and civil aviation agreements as well as a Bilateral Trade Agreement with them. Vietnam continues to cooperate with the emotional issue of fully accounting for U.S. missing in action from the protracted Vietnam War.

The United States must continue to develop and further our relations with Vietnam. It is in our best interest to expand in the areas of humanitarian de-mining, regional security through military-to-military relations and cooperation on counterterrorism, as well as expanding economic cooperation. Expanding our relationship with Vietnam will assist in providing additional stability to a region fraught with potential powder kegs of instability.

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PREFACE

The ten year mark of renewed direct diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam is approaching. The first direct civilian flight between the United States and Vietnam in almost thirty years occurred in December 2004. The United States has become Vietnam's largest export market and trade between the two nations has doubled over the past year. The government of Vietnam is now making a concerted effort to directly court closer relations with the United States.

Given the relevance of Vietnam to the stability of Southeast Asia, coupled with the strategic importance of the Strait of Malacca and Sea Lines of Communication to world trade and the war on terrorism, it is time to integrate Vietnam into a collective cooperative security engagement in Southeast Asia. We can accomplish this by expanding support in the areas of trade, humanitarian assistance and military cooperation programs designed to support our national security and military strategies.

As a Southeast Asian Foreign Area Officer (FAO) for the United States Army, I have spent over twelve years of my career in the Pacific Area of Operations. I served two tours of duty each in the Republic of Korea and the Kingdom of Thailand. I served an additional four years in Hawaii, where I conducted numerous training missions into Southeast Asia. I visited to Vietnam in 2000. Throughout this timeframe I have seen many changes to our cooperative security arrangements in the Pacific Area of Operations. In such a large and diverse region, change is normal.

Following completion of the U.S. Army War College in June 2005, I will return to Southeast Asia as the army attaché in Thailand. As such, I am interested in security engagement programs that will help contribute to the stability of Southeast Asia. I believe Vietnam is key to regional stability and the war on terrorism in Southeast Asia. As such, this paper proposes closer military cooperation with Vietnam as the logical next step in our developing relationship with Vietnam, in order to help achieve our strategic objectives and goals for the regional.

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MILITARY-TO-MILITARY COOPERATION WITH VIETNAM

AMERICA'S INTERNATIONAL SECURITY GOALS

The National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States of America was published in September 2002 under the signature of President George W. Bush. The NSS stipulates the policy direction the current administration has set in order to achieve our international goals of "political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity."¹ The NSS further details eight ways which the U.S. will achieve these goals. Among these are: champion aspirations for human dignity, strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism, work with others to defuse regional conflicts, and expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy.²

In direct support of the NSS is the National Military Strategy of the United States of America. This document describes "the ways and means to protect the United States, prevent conflict and surprise attack and prevail against adversaries that threaten our homeland, deployed forces, allies and friends."³ Security Cooperation measures are key components of these ways and means. Security Cooperation includes military assistance programs that are designed to "directly contribute to American national security and foreign policy objectives."⁴ Military-to-military assistance and cooperation programs are designed to complement other national level cooperation efforts. By using international military training programs, humanitarian demining and assistance, direct military dialogue, and other means, the U.S. military contributes to the National Security Strategy to protect U.S. interests in a variety of constructive ways.

U.S. INTERESTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Following the end of the Vietnam War, United States' policy toward Southeast Asia sent mixed signals on the strategic relevance of the region in relation to our goals. In most U.S. security analysts' eyes, Southeast Asia's strategic importance appeared to take a back seat to the potential regional threats posed by disputes in the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula.⁵ However, since 9/11, the U.S. realized that Southeast Asia has a more significant strategic importance to the entire Pacific region and beyond. The sea lanes of communication from the Indian Ocean, thru the Strait of Malacca and South China Sea and into the Pacific Ocean, the United States' regional long range economic and security interests, and the global war on terrorism make Southeast Asia a region of particular strategic importance to the U.S.. As such, the U.S. has renewed its focus on the strategic relevance of the region.

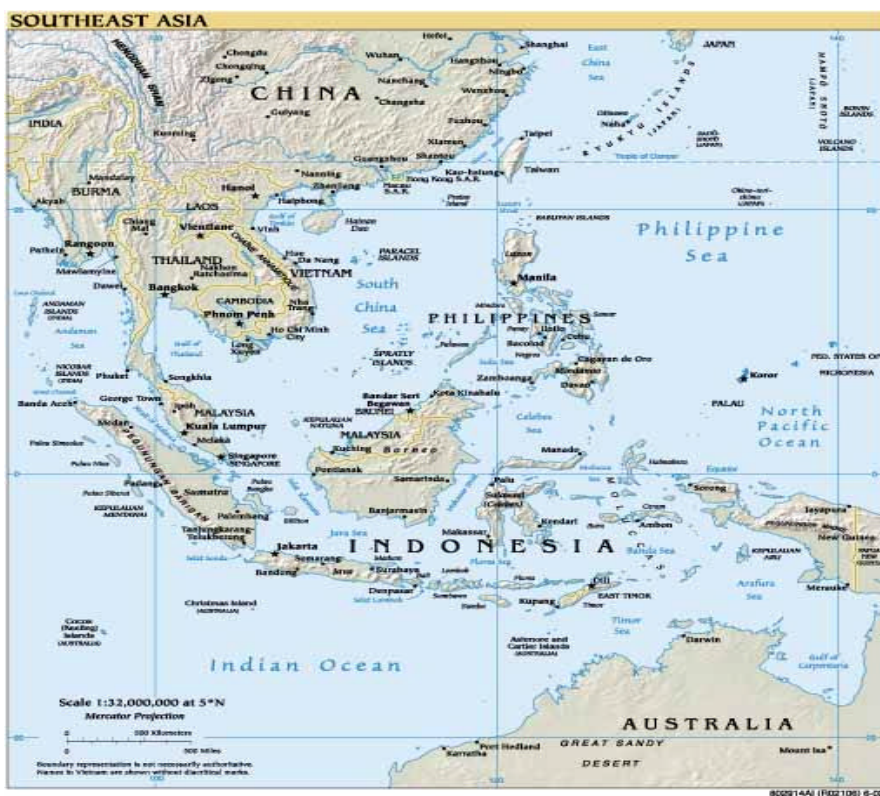


FIGURE 1. SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

U.S. long-term interests for Southeast Asia were recently clarified by Mathew P. Daley, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. Mr. Daley summarized U.S. goals in Southeast Asia as, promoting democracy and more open societies, strengthening our ties with key Southeast Asian nations to combat terrorism, and ensuring stability and economic growth.⁶ Additionally, during Congressional testimony, Angel M. Rabasa, Senior Policy Analyst of the RAND Corporation, re-stated our national interests in the region as “to promote a community of prosperous Southeast Asian nations that is growing economically, open to free trade investment, politically stable as well as accountable to the peace of the people and hopefully in a circumstance of peace.”⁷ These goals can only truly be achieved by engaging all nations in Southeast Asia, to include communist Vietnam, in constructive and cooperative ways. Given our stated international goals, coupled with current U.S. interests and cooperative efforts in Southeast Asia, I believe it is in our national interests to expand military-to-military cooperation with Vietnam.

THREATS TO U.S. INTERESTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Threats to our strategic interests in Southeast Asia are generally two-fold. The first is the regional threat linked to the greater global war on terrorism. The second threat to our long-term interests in the region is China's growing influence in Southeast Asia.

The most visible threat to the region seen today is that posed by terrorist organizations. In response, we have several ongoing operations in Southeast Asia to include direct troop involvement in the Philippines, dialogue and cooperation with Singapore on coordinating security of shipping lanes in the Strait of Malacca and funding International Military Education and Training (IMET) for nations like Malaysia and Thailand in order to train military and security personnel in counter terrorism. For Indonesia, there is a range of non-military assistance to include counter terrorism training for police, customs and banking officials.

Arguably the more significant long-term threat to our Southeast Asia regional interests is that posed by China's growing influence. A recent report by the Council on Foreign Relations stated that "China poses significant economic, military, and political challenges for the United States and for the nations of Southeast Asia."⁸ China's economy has been growing at an average rate in excess of 9% for more than a decade, and is projected to continue to increase. This huge growth is creating an expansion on demands for markets, consumer goods and resources and energy sources. According to Rommel C. Banaoi, Vice President of Academic Affairs, National Defense College of the Philippines, "China regards the region [Southeast Asia] as vital for its own growth and prosperity."⁹

China's ever increasing economic growth is allowing it to expand many military programs at a rate faster than her Asian neighbors. China's growing military capabilities, coupled with her economic prosperity, is cause for some alarm in Southeast Asia. However, despite a cautious eye from many Southeast Asian nations on China's true intentions in the region, China has become the primary source of economic and military assistance to several nations in the region. The recent 25 point China-Cambodia bilateral agreement in the areas of industrial, humanitarian and infrastructure assistance to Cambodia is but one example. Even if these intentions are benign, they can clearly be seen as a means by China to gain dominant influence in a region that has been closely tied to the U.S. since the end of World War II.¹⁰

VIETNAM'S RELEVANCE

First and foremost, Vietnam is a major regional player in Southeast Asia. It claims Southeast Asia's second largest population with over 80 million people, the largest military in the region, and an estimated known oil reserve of 600 million barrels. In 1995, Vietnam became

a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and in 1998, became a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group of nations.

Second, Vietnam is strategically located in the region due to its relative position to the sea lanes in the South China Sea. A pan-Islamic group, such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) with links to Al Qaida, that interdicts the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea would be detrimental not just to the United States, but also to the economies of all the nations throughout the region and the entire world. The United States use the Strait and the South China Sea as a line of communications and shipping of military forces from the Pacific to the Middle East. Additionally, over 50 percent of the world's shipping transits these sea lanes and straits.

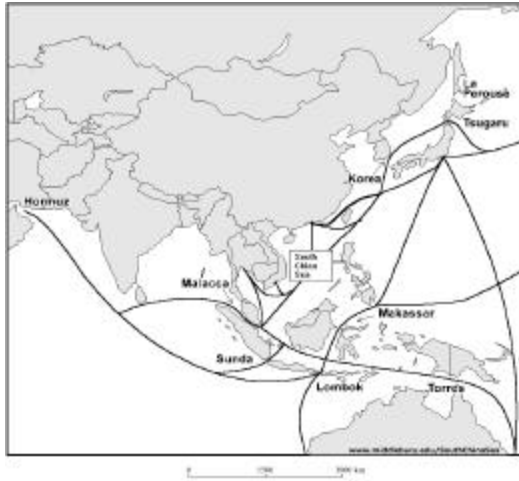


FIGURE 2. SHIPPING LANES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

As greater vigilance and preemptive protection measures are placed on potential terrorist targets on land in the region, terrorist organizations might identify the straits as a softer target for attack and disruption. Therefore, protecting the sea lanes in Southeast Asia is a critical task, and requires a cooperative effort from all Southeast Asia countries. Encouraging Vietnamese cooperation and participation in this collective security effort can be considered a critical goal for the United States and her regional allies to pursue.

Third, Vietnam shares a border with China, has deep water ports at Cam Rahn Bay and Haiphong Harbor, and is one of six nations laying claim to the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. According to the Center for National Policy (CNP) in a recent review of U.S. – Vietnamese relations, Vietnam can be instrumental in our goals to increase U.S. influence and thus check China's expansion in the region.¹¹ China is the world's second-largest consumer of oil and was responsible for the 35% in the global rise in world oil demands in 2003.¹² As such, China is very keen to gaining unlimited and uncontested access to known and suspected oil reserves in Southeast Asia, preferably through peaceful means. To counter China's pursuits, the U.S. must encourage Vietnam to join in cooperative economic and security arrangements with the United States and other Southeast Asian countries. These measures will not only limit Chinese access to Vietnamese oil, gas and deep water ports, but will greatly enhance regional security, and further support U.S regional goals and objectives.

U.S. POLICY OBJECTIVES FOR VIETNAM

The United States' long-term policy objectives for Vietnam are a secure, stable, prosperous, and open Vietnam.¹³ Our goal is for Vietnam to become globally integrated, with increased economic and mutually beneficial trade relations with the United States. In 1995 the U.S. normalized relations with Vietnam. Since that time we have negotiated a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), a Counter-Narcotics Agreement, and a Civil-Aviation Agreement. We work jointly on the sensitive issue of accounting for missing-in-action from the Vietnam War. We must view these measures as only the beginning of our normalized relations with Vietnam, and find common ground to expand our relationship in other areas, to include military cooperation.

CURRENT U.S. SUPPORT TO VIETNAM

Since normalizing relations with the Government of Vietnam, U.S. support has mostly been in the form of economic aid provided annually through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Most of these programs are for humanitarian assistance and civic development projects. For example, the United States provided over \$13 million for Child Survival and Health (CSH) and Development Assistance (DA) programs in Vietnam in 2003.¹⁴ These programs are designed to promote our security objectives for Vietnam, help disadvantaged peoples, such as those with AIDS/HIV or affected from natural disasters, and to help promote Vietnam to become a constructive and positive regional player in Southeast Asia.

The U.S. has become one of Vietnam's largest trading partners over the last 10 years. Prior to normalizing relations and signing the BTA with Vietnam, the U.S. had a combined import/export trade of approximately \$225 million in 1994. That figure has grown to over \$3.5 billion in the first seven months of 2004 and is more in line with Vietnam's other major trading partners of Japan, Hong Kong and China.¹⁵ It is thus evident that together we are moving in the right direction even though problems and misunderstandings persist.

To continue this progress, it is time to begin expanding our military-to-military cooperation with Vietnam. According to Admiral Tom Fargo, Commander of U.S. Pacific Command, increasing our relationship with Vietnam at the military level will further improve our mutual understanding on common security concerns.¹⁶ Instituting and expanding this policy will provide additional roots of stability to a region fraught with potential powder kegs of instability that could affect our interests. Expanding our military relations with Vietnam will help to promote U.S. influence in an important Southeast Asia country. More importantly, these measures will support the overall goals of our National Security Strategy.¹⁷ These goals include championing the causes of human dignity, strengthening alliances to defeat regional terrorism, working with

all the nations in the region to avoid regional conflicts, and working to develop a more open and democratic Vietnam.

Another important aspect of a closer relationship with Vietnam is access to ports and facilities in the region. The most recent Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report states “The possibility exists that a military competitor with a formidable resource base will emerge in the region.”¹⁸ The QDR goes on to state “The density of U.S. basing and en route infrastructure is lower than in other critical regions. The United States also has less assurance of access to facilities in the region. This places a premium on securing additional access and infrastructure agreements and on developing systems capable of sustained operations at great distances with minimal theater-based support.”¹⁹ With her resources, deep water ports, and key regional location along the South China Sea, Vietnam is an ideal location for these facilities. Closer military cooperation could help us achieve access to these facilities.

MILITARY-TO-MILITARY COOPERATION

Implementing closer military-to-military relations with Vietnam will help educate their military and civilian leaders on our democratic system, strengthen our relations, and provide another avenue to champion the causes of human rights in Vietnam. Areas of U.S. military-to-military cooperation that should be developed, pursued and expanded with Vietnam include:

- Establishing a formal military-to-military exchange and visit program as a forum for bilateral military discussions.
- Involving Vietnamese military participation in U.S. – Southeast Asian regional exercises such as COBRA GOLD.
- Initiating an International Military and Education and Training (IMET) program for Vietnam.
- Expanded U.S. assistance for demining efforts in Vietnam.

BILATERAL MILITARY-TO-MILITARY VISITS AND DISCUSSIONS

The U.S. Pacific Command should conduct regularly scheduled and funded bilateral exchange visits and dialogue forums with Vietnam. In November 2003 the United States conducted the first navy ship port visit to Vietnam since the end of the Vietnam War. That same month Vietnam’s Defense Minister traveled to Washington for an exchange of views. In February 2004 Admiral Fargo spoke at Vietnam’s National Defense Academy. During his visit

Admiral Fargo stated “the purpose of this relationship is to further improve, at a military level, mutual understanding by exchanging perspectives on common security concerns.”²⁰

We must take the opportunity and the momentum to capitalize on these events. Cooperation through dialogue minimizes miscommunication and cultural differences, provides a venue for reaching agreements on mutual cooperation efforts and provides an alternative avenue for conflict resolution. Bilateral military-to-military visits and discussion forums between the U.S. and Vietnam can be the basis for further cooperation on regional security issues to include counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics operations and interdiction, military medicine, disaster relief, demining, and search and rescue.²¹ Most useful could be dialogue that leads to the U.S. Navy gaining access to Vietnamese ports, which could be mutually beneficial to the U.S. militarily and to the Vietnamese economically.

REGIONAL EXERCISE PARTICIPATION

Cobra Gold (CG) is the U.S. Pacific region's largest joint/combined multilateral exercise. It is designed to improve combined/joint military interoperability, enhance security relationships and demonstrate U.S. resolve to support the security and humanitarian interests of U.S. friends and allies in the region.²² U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, Darryl N. Johnson said. “Each year, Cobra Gold renews the United States’ commitment to our friends and allies in the Asia-Pacific region.” Johnson said. “Cobra Gold is constantly evolving to meet the national security needs of all of our countries. What started as a small naval task force exercise in the early ‘80s has evolved into a multinational, multifaceted event promoting regional stability and security.”²³

Former Commander of Pacific Command, Admiral Blair, stated that Vietnam’s full participation in this regional military exercise would be contingent on her willingness to participate first as observers followed later by more active involvement. He relayed that most Vietnamese officials he spoke with expressed a belief that training together in a multilateral military environment was good for Vietnam and the region. These multilateral training events develop better cooperation and understanding in such areas as disaster and humanitarian relief, peace keeping and non-combatant evacuation operations.²⁴ Indeed, Cobra Gold 2004 Exercise Supreme Commander, Thai Lt. Gen. Wannaprasert Hern, shared his country’s insight of the multinational aspect of the exercise by stating. “(Cobra Gold) is the best exercise in the Southeast of Asia,” he said. “All of our nation’s militaries are coming together to find a common virtue of compassion, cooperation and goodwill.”²⁵

For the first time, Vietnam sent observers to the Cobra Gold exercise in 2004. This was seen as the first step in greater involvement by Vietnam in military-to-military cooperation in the

region. The U.S. and our other regional allies should encourage Vietnam to fully integrate their military capabilities into regional training exercises. Vietnam retains the largest military of any Southeast Asian nation. Greater involvement by Vietnam will foster cooperation and understanding of regional military capabilities. Encouraging Vietnam to participate in these kinds of multinational military training events increases the combined regional military assets that can be used for regional peace keeping and disaster relief, and reduces the likelihood of Vietnam conducting unilateral military excursions against her neighbors. This will enhance regional security and increase capabilities for the collective cooperation against terrorism in Southeast Asia.

INITIATE IMET FUNDING FOR VIETNAM

The International Military and Education Training (IMET) program is a key component of our U.S. security cooperation program. It is a grant program funded through the State Department's International Affairs Budget and managed by the Department of Defense. The IMET program provides military and civilian personnel from approved countries with selected educational opportunities taught by the Department of Defense and other U.S. Institutions. The IMET goals are to educate international officers on U.S. military and security related subjects, provide insight to the American democratic way of life, and provide awareness on respect for international standards on human rights. Over 2,000 courses are offered, including some on human rights and civil-military relations.

Currently, Vietnam is not receiving IMET funding, which requires congressional approval. Although token amounts of money have been requested for Vietnam by PACOM since 2001, continuing concerns of the limitations of Vietnam's human rights and religious freedoms have led Congress to withhold this program. Continuing to withhold this program could be more detrimental to future cooperation than intended. For example, regarding Indonesia, in 1992 Congress voted to withhold additional IMET to Indonesia based on human rights violations in East Timor. Withholding IMET funding did not modify Indonesia's behavior with respect for human rights. It can be argued that reduced exposure to internationally accepted human rights standards through international military training opportunities contributed to further problems, eventually resulting in the international community intervening in East Timor. Presently, the lack of senior Indonesian officers and officials educated in the American system, trained in modern tactics and techniques, and exposed to American values, is causing an adverse impact on the fight against terrorism in the region.²⁶

Congress should immediately authorize some IMET for Vietnam. With the authorization, restrictions can be placed on the types of training funded until further human rights improvements are made in Vietnam. Specific IMET funded programs focusing on military justice, civilian control over the military and recognition of human rights can be the initial step. Funding assistance for English training labs could begin right away. These labs will help teach English to military and civilian personnel who could eventually attend training in the U.S. under future IMET funding. Providing these labs and courses will support military-to-military interoperability between the U.S. and Vietnam, assist in providing for Vietnam's increased understanding of the importance of internationally respected human rights, and provide the framework for future military-to-military contact and exchange visits.

EXPANDING VIETNAM DEMINING OPERATIONS

The United States' Humanitarian Demining program has three major goals. These are, to assist nations to alleviate the threat of landmines to innocents, promote U.S. foreign policy and national security, and encourage international participation to eliminate the threat of landmines to civilians around the world by 2010.²⁷ Vietnam remains one of the most heavily mined countries in all of Southeast Asia. Annually, Vietnam suffers over 2,000 casualties from mines and unexploded ordnance left over from years of conflicts. The U.S. should increase support for demining operations in Vietnam.

Even though Vietnam is a poor country, its political leadership is cautious in implementing reforms required to increase prosperity, to include ridding itself of the legacy of unexploded ordnance. Yet recent moves welcoming involvement from the outside world are creating new possibilities. The efforts supported by the Leahy War Victims Fund and the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund are making a sustained improvements in the quality of life for some of the country's most vulnerable citizens, and are improving relations between Vietnam and the United States. No matter how beneficial these assistance measures are to the victims, they are unfortunately only reactive programs geared more to rehabilitation efforts. What is really needed are more proactive means to eliminate the hazards all together.

Vietnam joined the U.S. Humanitarian Demining effort in 2000. Following this agreement, the U.S. funded mine awareness training programs in several provinces in Vietnam. Additionally, we have funded computer systems for Vietnamese demining efforts and funded a national survey to scope the demining problem. However, of the \$86 million dollars the U.S. has invested in demining efforts in Southeast Asia, Vietnam has received less than 4%. Millions of square meters in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand have been cleared of landmines.

Additionally, U.S. military forces have trained thousands of deminers in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. However, to date, there have been no direct U.S. supported mine clearing operations in Vietnam.

Increased funding for demining training, purchasing of the latest demining technology and providing support for victims of landmines in Vietnam will further U.S. – Vietnamese relations. Military supported training of indigenous Vietnamese deminers, equipped with state of the art demining equipment, will greatly assist in Vietnam's internal demining efforts and save untold countless Vietnamese from death and disfigurement. We are morally obligated to assist in expanding our demining efforts in Vietnam, since we are responsible for a large portion of the unexploded ordnance. Cooperation with Vietnam in locating and destroying these hazards further supports our strategic goal of promoting respect for human dignity while providing the foundation for building an improved and safer Vietnam. These efforts will reap additional benefits by gaining U.S. influence and favor in an important Southeast Asian nation once considered our adversary. Millions of acres of land can be cleared and then safely used for agriculture and industry, thus expanding Vietnam's productivity.

Additionally, the Vietnamese government has a long standing claim that Agent Orange, a defoliant containing dioxins, has seriously damaged the health of those living in the areas in Vietnam where it was used. The U.S. says there is no proof of the health problems of the Vietnamese residing in the defoliated regions is associated to Agent Orange. However, in the U.S., Vietnam veterans who handled Agent Orange can now claim compensation for a range of diseases associated with dioxins.²⁸ The U.S. should open a dialogue with, and provide information to, Vietnam on the possible health hazards that may be associated with the war-time defoliants and the dioxins they contained. Direct and visible U.S. support to demining operations and Agent Orange disclosures will enhance our image with the older generation of Vietnamese who fought in the Indochina War. Direct military involvement in training and support for demining Vietnam will also demonstrate the humanitarian side of our military capabilities.

RISKS

Risks in expanding military-to-military cooperation with Vietnam are small compared to the potential risks for failing to move in a more cooperative way. There are three potential risks to expanding military cooperation with Vietnam. The first risk is failure to gain public support in the U. S. for direct military cooperation, thus adversely affecting congressional authorizations for the above mentioned programs. Countless thousands of Vietnam veterans and their families,

coupled with the large number of naturalized Americans of Vietnamese heritage, might not support direct U.S. military cooperation with the military of Vietnam. Emotions still run strong in some of these communities on the issue of our missing-in-action from the war. Others still want to see democratic reforms before we further our relations. A recent visit to Vietnam of former South Vietnamese Premier, Nguyen Cao Ky, sparked an outcry from many overseas Vietnamese that his visit provided legitimacy to the communists who control Vietnam.²⁹ In order to dissuade these attitudes, we must institute a public information campaign clearly defining our cooperative programs with Vietnam. We must specifically detail these programs and their support of advancing U.S. interests in the region.

The second risk is that by expanding military cooperation we will send the wrong signal to the Government of Vietnam, thus actually slowing democratic reforms, reforms on human rights, and other humanitarian issues. According to the U.S. State Department's latest reports on human rights Practices and International Religious Freedom, Vietnam has an unacceptable record in both areas. In the area of Human Rights the Government of Vietnam "continues to commit serious abuses."³⁰ Although the Government of Vietnam recognizes freedom of religion, there are many controls placed on religious practices.³¹ This has already led for some in the U.S. government to demand withholding some U.S. aid and trade until improvements are made. However, this is not the answer. The record shows that increasing opportunities for military-to-military cooperation induces positive changes in many areas, to include the areas of human rights and democratic reforms. This is especially true where IMET funding and military-to-military dialogue are used to promote U.S. democratic values and internationally accepted standards on human rights. If Indonesia can be seen as a regional example of how withholding military aid failed to induce human rights reforms, then we should learn from this lesson. We cannot afford to lose another 10 years with Vietnam by further withholding military education, training and dialogue.

The final risk is that military-to-military cooperation with Vietnam might fuel further militarization of Southeast Asia. This is an unwarranted concern. Since the economic collapse in Asian markets in 1997, military spending in Southeast Asia has slowed considerably. For example, in 1997 Vietnam spent an estimated \$5 billion on military expenditures compared to only \$1.8 billion in 2002. Actually the trend in most Southeast Asian nations shows less spending on defense after 9/11 than before.³² Therefore, it is difficult to believe that expanding military cooperation with Vietnam would be the spark to an arms race in the region. On the contrary, better military cooperation between the Southeast Asian nations, including Vietnam, would diffuse the need for large unilateral national defense spending policies throughout the

region. Multinational military cooperation backed by each nation's political will, coupled with support from the U.S., will provide regional security and a collective approach to defeat terrorist organizations in Southeast Asia and help bolster U.S. influence.

CONCLUSION

Southeast Asia is a region of strategic interest to the United States. As such, we must engage all nations in the region both collectively and individually in order to maintain our influence. This includes building closer ties and cooperation with Vietnam, who maintains the largest military and the second largest population in Southeast Asia.

We currently engage Vietnam in a range of cooperative arrangements to include accounting for the missing in action from the Vietnam War, providing humanitarian assistance in the areas of mine awareness funding and disaster assistance, and increased trade generated by the Bilateral Trade Agreement. However, we must demonstrate to Vietnam that our commitment to their development and their strategic relevance to the region is indeed important and their cooperation is mutually beneficial. For instance, in 2003 the United States provided Vietnam with just over \$13 million dollars in CSH and DA funding. At the same time we provided almost \$26 million to Cambodia for the same programs. The funds requested for Vietnam and Cambodia in 2005 for these same programs is \$10.2 and \$25.5 million respectively.

VIETNAM

(\$ in thousands)

Account	FY 2003 Actual	FY 2004 Estimate	FY 2005 Request
CSH	5,300	6,600	5,700
DA	7,671	3,000	4,500
IMET	-	100	50
NADR-EXBS	100	230	280
NADR-HD	2,427	2,076	2,600

CAMBODIA

(\$ in thousands)

Account	FY 2003 Actual	FY 2004 Estimate	FY 2005 Request
CSH	22,100	29,860	25,300
DA	3,687	2,000	2,200
ESF	15,000	16,900	17,000
IMET	-	-	50
NADR-EXBS	2,765	3,038	3,300
NADR-HD	-	300	-

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF US SUPPORT TO VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA

As shown, the amount requested for Cambodia is substantially more than for Vietnam. Indeed, the amount requested for Vietnam is actually decreasing. During the same upcoming period, the requested IMET funding for both Cambodia and Vietnam for 2005 is identical; a mere fifty thousand dollars each. Is Cambodia of greater strategic relevance in Southeast Asia than is Vietnam? I believe the answer is clearly no. Therefore, we must be careful of what signal we are sending to nations through our assistance programs. These programs are an extension of our economic and security policies for our friends and foes alike. If we intend for these programs to be an extension of our foreign policy, then we must use them to send clear and meaningful signals. If we intend Vietnam to become a regional partner and ally, then we must increase their humanitarian assistance and economic programs, and develop closer military-to-military engagements opportunities commensurate with Vietnam's relative importance to the future security of the region.

Dialogue at the military level can lead to discussing U.S. Navy access to Cam Rahn Bay and Haiphong Harbor. Providing more funding and training to demining will make searching potential MIA sites from the war less hazardous, while reducing human suffering from the legacy of remaining unexploded ordnance. Initiating an IMET program will actually introduce Vietnam's military and government officials to concepts of democracy, human rights and freedoms, while developing a common basis of training at the military level that can assist in regional security operations. As these initial programs begin to provide results, they can be expanded to continue meeting our goals and long range objectives for the region. These measures fully support and progress many of the goals stated in our National Defense Strategy. Equally important, they build our influence in a region that is being solicited by an expanding China. Increased military-to-military cooperation with Vietnam will enhance regional security which can lend support to an expansion of trade, commerce and development that is mutually favorable to the United States of America and Vietnam.

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